

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON THE
EVACUATION OF ZAMBIAN NATIONALS FROM UKRAINE

Madam Speaker, I wish to, first of all, thank you for this opportunity to update the House on a matter of absolute importance and also to apprise the House on the measures that the Government has undertaken in order to ensure the safety and security as well as the evacuation of our nationals in Ukraine.

Madam Speaker, as this House may be aware, on 24th February, 2022, following the unfortunate turn of events in Ukraine, Mr Hakainde Hichilema, President of the Republic of Zambia, directed that our nationals are evacuated. This was preceded by a physical assessment that was carried out by our mission and embassy in Moscow on 17th February, 2022. The staff at our embassy took stock, engaged and advised the Zambian community of the necessary precautionary security measures that had to be undertaken.

Madam Speaker, following that assessment and directive from the President, a detailed evacuation plan was put in place by the relevant arms of Government and they included the following:

- (a) creation of a media platform by the embassy where all Zambians in Ukraine were encouraged to join. This platform has been providing our nationals with the relevant up-to-date information and a strategy for their evacuation;
- (b) securing of a plane in Warsaw, Poland, by the Government in order to transport safely our nationals, following the closure of public transport and airports in Ukraine;
- (c) establishment of a rendezvous point in a city called Lviv on the Western side of Ukraine;

- (d) process of planning the movement of our nationals from Lviv towards the Polish border in Hrebenne;
- (e) the embassy in Moscow has been painstakingly coordinating the movement of our nationals within Ukraine while our Zambian staff from the embassy in Berlin, Germany, has been stationed at the Polish border since last Saturday to receive our nationals. In addition, our honorary consul to Poland has been at the border since Friday to provide the much needed support to our nationals and also, to facilitate immigration procedures;
- (f) the Government also arranged for the waiver of visas for our nationals into Poland; and
- (g) those closer to the border with Russia are being coordinated and assisted by our staff in Moscow through our embassy in Russia.

Madam Speaker, as indicated in various statements issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, specifically on 22nd, 24th, 26th and 28th February, 2022, we have 141 known Zambian nationals in Ukraine. Out of this number, twenty-seven have opted to remain in Ukraine having integrated in that society over many years. Therefore, those of our nationals scheduled for evacuation come to a total of 114.

Madam Speaker, certainly the Zambian Government has evacuated so far out of Ukraine, eighty of our nationals who are accommodated in a conducive facility in Warsaw, Poland, where the Government has also ensured the provision of warm food and other necessities to our nationals.

Madam Speaker, most of these Zambian nationals are students. Therefore, our students were being evacuated, first of all, out of Lviv, where the Government organised buses, which took them to the border at Hrebenne. All our nationals have been facilitated to the border safely following the waiver of visas.

Madam Speaker, I must mentioned that a few of our students have also been evacuated through other countries, including Romania and Hungary. Our staff has been on hand to guide students who have moved through other countries on their own accord. We have five of our nationals who have opted not to register for evacuation and they have found their way into Romania.

Madam Speaker, of our nationals yet to be evacuated, one national is still in Lviv as at two hours ago and is being guided on how to directly make his way to Warsaw by our team. Three are in a city called Kharkiv and arrangements remain in place by the Zambian Government to facilitate their safe evacuation. The three students are safe and our staff is in consultant communication with them to monitor their wellbeing and safety.

Madam Speaker, fourteen of our nationals are still in transit from different parts of Ukraine. We are constantly in touch with them. We are also monitoring their movements to ensure safe passage for them in anticipation of their evacuation to Zambia.

Madam Speaker, we have an addition of fourteen who are still in the city called Sumy, which is located on the Western side of Ukraine and very close to the Russian border. Unfortunately, I must mention that this is a high-risk area. As things are, the city of Sumy is still surrounded by Russian troops. The Zambian Government has continued to engage the Government of the Russian Federation to quest the assistance to facilitate the safe passage of its nationals through Russia. Our staff in Moscow has ascertained the wellbeing of our fourteen students. We have established that they are well, they have warm food, and that water is being provided to them.

Madam Speaker, I wish also to mention that the situation in Ukraine has been a very difficult and complex process that the Government has been dealing with. We have been faced with a number of challenges, some of which I now highlight.

Our nationals who have opted not to use transport that has been organized by the Zambian Government have endured some challenges. Some of them were dropped 20 km from the border and some them slept on the way. It also resulted that they had to walk the stretch of 20 km before meeting our staff at the border.

Madam Speaker, may I also mention that there are multiple security check points that our people have had to endure before getting to the border.

Madam Speaker, Ukrainian officials have also been giving priority to the elderly, women and children. This has resulted into our male children, our nationals having to endure longer waiting times at the border, which sometimes, like I have mentioned Madam Speaker, has resulted into them sleeping at the border.

Madam Speaker, further, we have also noticed that parents and guardians are giving contradictory guidance to the children on how to leave Ukraine. We would like to take this opportunity to urge them to strictly follow the safe route that the Government is providing.

Madam Speaker, may I also reassure the House, that the Zambian Government will continue to work around the clock and tirelessly, to ensure that our nationals are evacuated and brought back home safely.

Madam Speaker, all things being equal, we intend to fly our children into Lusaka, tentatively by Friday, 4th March, 2022, which is this week. Parents and guardians of our children are again strongly urged to ensure that all the children who have been secured by the Government board the plane and no alternative arrangements should be made.

Madam Speaker, this Government will not only evacuate our nationals back home, but also, take this opportunity to assure parents that the Government will also facilitate the return of these children back to Ukraine in order for them to finish their education process, once Ukraine is normalised and is a safe haven.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.